United Nations A/C.2/52/SR.37

General Assembly
Fifty-second session

Official Records

Distr.: General
25 February 1998
English
Original: Spanish

Second Committee

Summary record of the 37th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 11 November 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. De Rojas ..... (Venezuela)

Contents

Agenda item 12: Report of the Economic and Social Council (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

97-82724 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 12: Report of the Economic and Social Council (*continued*) (A/52/3, A/52/175-E/1997/75, A/52/203-E/1997/85, A/52/212, A/52/222 and A/52/354; A/C.2/52/5; E/1997/49 and E/1997/INF/3/Add.1)

1. **Mr. Kamal** (Pakistan), speaking as Chairman of the working group on informatics, said that by resolution 1995/61 of 28 July 1995 the Economic and Social Council had established the working group on informatics with the principal aim of ensuring that, within existing resources, member States should enjoy easy, economical and unhindered access to the computerized databases and information systems of the United Nations.

2. During the initial phase of its work, the working group had focused on three areas requiring immediate attention, namely connectivity between permanent missions and the United Nations system, training and the removal of impediments to access to United Na.' ns databases. At the same time, the technical sub-group was getting ready to address the most specific issues with a view to meeting the objectives which had been set. Some of the working group's achievements needed to be flagged: Connectivity with all missions had been established in June; training programmes based on the needs of the missions and the Secretariat had been established; various obstacles to network access had been eliminated and connectivity had been established between the optical disk system and the Internet; all resolutions and decisions of the major organs of the United Nations dating from 1946 had been loaded onto the system in the six official languages; important United Nations documents and information had been systematically posted on the Organization's home page on the Internet; training on how to use hypertext mark-up language (HTML) had been offered to permanent missions, thereby enabling them to create their own home pages; a video-conferencing facility had been established and personal computers with Internet connection had been installed in the Delegates' Lounge and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, and information symposiums had been organized with the participation of representatives of permanent missions, the Secretariat and the private sector. Those accomplishments had resulted in more efficient use of communications technology and reductions in travel and printing costs. They had also made it possible to save time and avoid waste and duplication.

3. Other recent initiatives included the establishment of a uniform set of e-mail addresses or "List-serv" group addresses for each regional group and the Group of 77, which had enabled e-mail messages to be sent automatically to all permanent missions and Member States in that group. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library had initiated the formation of a consortium to share the cost of site licences for on-line services such as the *Economist Intelligence Unit* and *NewsEdge*. The goal was to include permanent missions in the contracts as authorized users. Various training courses had also been organized on how to use the Internet. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which had played a pivotal role in the area of connectivity and the elimination of impediments to network access, had transferred responsibility for providing permanent missions with support to the Secretariat. Although the resources of the Secretariat were less than adequate for the challenge, it would endeavour to maintain services to Member States. The technical sub-group was currently formulating a system-wide information management strategy. The working group was drafting a paper on the technical problem of converting computer dates to the year 2000, which would be circulated to permanent missions. Since each organization of the United Nations system used a different domain name on the Internet, thus making it difficult to access its databases, the working group was examining the possibility of creating a new domain name for the United Nations which would subsume all the organizations in the United Nations system. The technical sub-group was looking at ways of enabling Member States to utilize the sustainable development networking programme (SDNP) run by UNDP. It was also seeking to link up video-conferencing systems with universities and promote the use of information technology in the drafting of resolutions and documents.

4. **Mr. Kvaldheim** (Norway), referring to the Report of the Secretary-General on new and innovative ideas for generating funds for globally agreed commitments and priorities contained in document A/52/303-E/1997/85, said that the document lacked a review of the modalities, feasibility, costs and benefits of the implementation of new and innovative sources for generating funds, as mandated in Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/48. Moreover, the conclusions in paragraph 10 seemed somewhat categorical given the limited input from Governments and organizations.

5. Norway believed that the sources of funding discussed in the report should be additional to official development assistance and should not be used as core funds for the activities of the United Nations system. Furthermore, a realistic assessment of the present situation and future prospects with respect to voluntary funds, as well as the scale of funds required for United Nations activities, indicated that additional funds ought to come mainly from countries other than traditional donors or via new and

innovative funding mechanisms. His Government supported the Secretary-General's proposal to establish an Office for Development Financing which would carry out the important function of generating new funds and could further the analytical work on those issues with the assistance of internationally recognized experts in the field.

6. **Mr. Golubov** (Ukraine) said that the progress made in the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, noted in the report of the Economic and Social Council, had led to more efficient organization of the high-level segment of the Council, beginning with the selection of an appropriate topic for the substantive session. Nevertheless, the results of the most recent session indicated that much remained to be done. For example, the debates on the agreed conclusions of the high-level segment had lasted too long and the text of those conclusions had omitted some of the useful observations made during the plenary meetings. Although the number of resolutions and decisions adopted had decreased and unproductive discussions had been avoided, the methods of work needed further improvement; in addition, the agenda for the general segment was still overburdened.

7. Concerning the programme for reform proposed by the Secretary-General, his delegation supported the recommendation to enhance the Council's essential policy management and coordinating roles to equip it to better fulfil its role in the macroeconomic policy coordination dialogue. He also agreed that the Council needed to organize its sessions and reporting procedures better and to rationalize its subsidiary machinery. However, he did not believe that the work and functions of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and Energy for Development and of the Committee on Natural Resources should be consolidated into the Commission on Sustainable Development, because it would overload the functions of that Commission, which was responsible for the implementation of Agenda 21. His delegation also had some doubts about the proposal to hold various segments of the Council at different times of the year, since, in addition to the possible increase in costs involved, decisions might lose their integrated character. Ukraine supported the recommendation of the Secretary-General to extend the duration of the operational activities segment and to replace the Committee for Development Planning by panels of experts on various policy issues.

8. **Mr. Dos Santos** (Mozambique) said that his delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He welcomed the conclusions of the 1997 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council held in Geneva and the agreed conclusions of the high-level segment on the theme "Fostering an enabling environment for development: financial flows, including capital flows, investment and trade". In the high-level segment, the broad elements of an enabling international environment for development had been defined, including the creation and maintenance of stable international conditions; democratization in international relations; establishment of a more multilateral trading system; and support for the weakest and most vulnerable members of the international community through more favourable treatment in trade and finance. At the national level, it had been determined that the adoption of sound macroeconomic policies and the creation of favourable conditions for investment were essential in order to create an enabling environment for development.

9. His Government had been promoting both domestic and foreign private investment by adopting measures to protect such investments, as well as measures on taxation. Moreover, within the framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), collective action had been taken to improve coordination and harmonization of macroeconomic policies with a view to attracting investments to the region. Those measures, combined with the prevailing political stability, offered investors a unique opportunity. However, international cooperation was also needed in order to create an enabling environment. Thus, his delegation called for implementation of the agreements reached, particularly in support of the least developed countries, so that they could grasp the opportunities offered by the globalization of the world economy.

10. The eradication of poverty in Mozambique was an issue of major concern to the Government and to society as a whole. In its five-year plan, the Government had given the highest priority to that issue, together with the provision of such basic social services as water supply and sanitation, since over 60 per cent of the rural and peri-urban population lived in absolute poverty and the majority of the population lacked drinking water. The issue of poverty, which would not be resolved in the short term, required collective international action, not through charity alone, but mainly through job creation while addressing global development issues.

11. The empowerment of women was related to broader issues of the participation of society as a whole in development, and the Council's agreed conclusions on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system was an important step in addressing that issue.

12. In his address to the General Assembly, the President of Mozambique had spoken of the relationship between peace, stability, democracy and the development process, and had stressed the desires and aspirations of the people of Mozambique to live in unity and harmony within diversity, in keeping with the culture of peace and forgiveness that was growing in the country. At the recent Maputo Conference on the Culture of Peace and Good Governance, it was recognized that peace and democracy were fundamental tools in fostering development, considering that one fifth of the world population lived in absolute poverty, suffering from illiteracy, hunger and malnutrition and endemic diseases.

13. He highlighted the importance of revitalizing the work of the Economic and Social Council in order for it to play a greater role in economic and social issues, and commended the positive high-level dialogue evolving between Member States, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the Bretton Woods institutions.

14. **Mr. Kapanga** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that his delegation supported the statement by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The programmes designed to promote the development of the most disadvantaged countries had not achieved the expected results: far from accelerating the pace of their development and consolidating international cooperation, the number of poor countries in the world had increased.

15. South-South cooperation and the provision of technical assistance from the developed countries must be increased in order for the countries of Africa to acquire the necessary capacity to create favourable conditions for sustainable development. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had joined the Southern African Development Community, demonstrating his Government's interest in improving its bilateral and multilateral relations and gaining understanding and support for its programme of national reconstruction. That programme was oriented towards meeting urgent needs and included rehabilitation measures of a humanitarian nature that deserved the unconditional support of the international community. A three-year plan had been approved with the following priorities: transport and communications infrastructure, agriculture, health care and social protection, education, job creation and the elimination of unemployment, and the security and protection of persons and property.

16. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which continued to suffer from the adverse effects of the crisis in the Great Lakes region, reiterated its request that General Assembly resolution 49/24 on special assistance to countries receiving refugees from Rwanda should be implemented fully so as to give those countries fair compensation for the expenses and the damage they had incurred as a result of the massive presence of refugees. At the same time, his country urged the international community, which had supported an unspeakable dictatorship for over 30 years, to honour its responsibilities and to allow the forthcoming elections to be held without delay. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had not fallen behind in the transition process, despite the difficulties it had faced.

17. His delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General (A/52/203) and hoped that further progress would be made in exploring new and innovative ideas for generating funds, particularly those which related to the creation of facilitating frameworks for linking the micro-credit and capital markets, investment incentives and debt-for-nature swaps. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was classified as a heavily indebted low-income country by the Bretton Woods institutions, was very interested in the new initiatives which the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had launched for heavily indebted countries, and considered that those initiatives appropriately complemented the current debt-reduction strategy pending the negotiation of a lasting solution to the debt problem.

18. **Ms. Bai Yongjie** (China), referring to the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, held in June 1997 in Geneva with the theme "Fostering an enabling environment for development: financial flows, including capital flows, investment and trade", highlighted the work accomplished during the high-level segment and the Council's important role in macroeconomic policy coordination and guidance. Since globalization and integration would continue to have an impact on the economic and social development processes of all countries for some time to come, her delegation felt that the participants in the high-level segment of the Council's sessions should regularly discuss macroeconomic policy coordination with a view to formulating timely recommendations on the steps to be taken in that area.

19. The operational activities segment, whose purpose was to coordinate the activities of funds and programmes, had not effectively fulfilled its function. Further measures must be taken to ensure that the Council could provide actual policy guidance to the various funds and programmes. The Council should give priority to the financing of development operations, which was an important part of the process of revitalizing the Organization's role in the economic and

social fields, and should propose viable solutions to the problem of financing.

20. The Council, which was aware of the need to enhance efficiency and cooperation among its subsidiary bodies, had improved the coordination and guidance it provided to them; however, there was room for further progress. The Council's priority in the coming years should be to coordinate the implementation of the commitments made at the international conferences held in recent years. The Council had continued its comprehensive review of the work of its subsidiary bodies, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/227. That process should continue until it was successfully completed within the time-frame set by the Assembly. Given the need to avoid duplication of effort and to enhance efficiency, care should be taken to coordinate that review process with other related processes.

21. All methods of mobilizing the resources needed for international cooperation for development should be explored. In that connection, it must be recalled that new financing proposals were a necessary complement, but not a substitute, for official development assistance. At the same time, the special situation of the developing countries should serve as a basic parameter in that area, since the purpose of exploring new sources of funding was to improve assistance to those countries, not to impose extra burdens on them. The Secretariat should continue to study and examine all new means of resource mobilization and to submit them to Member States for consideration.

22. The energy issue, whose importance was self-evident, was related to both environmental policy and economic and social development. A balance must be maintained between those two aspects in formulating policies and in establishing relevant institutions. Currently, a number of United Nations bodies were considering the energy issue from different perspectives; it was necessary to strengthen cooperation, communication and coordination among them.

23. The serious delays in the issuance of documents at the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council had negatively affected the work of Member States. Her delegation hoped that the Secretariat would take effective measures to redress that situation.

24. **Mr. Gerus** (Belarus) said that the restructuring of the work of the Economic and Social Council was a priority aspect of the reform of the United Nations system. A first step in that direction had already been taken with the adoption of General Assembly resolution 50/227 on further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, under which a mechanism had been established to enable the Council to enhance the efficiency of its work and to focus its efforts on the achievement of tangible results.

25. Despite the progress made in reviewing the mandates, composition and working methods of the Council's functional commissions and expert groups and bodies, care must be taken to ensure the full implementation of all provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/227, as well as of the Agenda for Development adopted on 20 June 1997, which reflected the aspirations of Member States with respect to the promotion of cooperation for development on a global scale. In that connection, it was necessary to strengthen the Council's role in coordinating and programming operational activities for development, taking into account the strategic priorities set by the General Assembly. Moreover, the Council should devise practical measures for developing and strengthening cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, and should make coordination arrangements to facilitate the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of global United Nations conferences. That could be achieved through the Council's subsidiary machinery, which should maintain closer cooperation with the Administrative Committee on Coordination. Those measures were important for revitalizing the work of the Economic and Social Council and for enhancing its efficiency, in accordance with the recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General in his report on the reform of the Organization (A/51/950). That report included a proposal to establish a substantive secretariat to support the activities of the Economic and Social Council, which was particularly important because the competent Secretariat departments were currently unable to prepare the documentation needed for the Council.

26. His delegation proposed that the current organization of the various segments of the Economic and Social Council's substantive sessions should be maintained. With respect to the restructuring and reform of the Council's subsidiary machinery, he supported the proposal that the functions of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and Energy for Development and of the Committee on Natural Resources should be consolidated into the Commission on Sustainable Development. The functions of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development should also be assigned to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

27. **Mr. Crighton** (Australia) placed on record his delegation's broad support for the United Nations reform and hoped that the General Assembly would approve the Secretary-General's proposals as soon as possible. With regard to the recommendation by the Committee for

Development Planning on the situation of the least developed countries, which was set forth in document A/52/3, he reaffirmed that Australia supported the work of the United Nations, in particular, its development efforts in support of national Governments. The question of graduation from the category of least developed countries must be given careful consideration in order to take account of all the pertinent factors.

28. His delegation had listened carefully to the statement made by the Prime Minister of Vanuatu in the General Assembly and that by the Permanent Representative of Vanuatu in the Second Committee with regard to deferring the recommendation of the Committee for Development Planning to remove Vanuatu from the list of least developed countries. The case of Vanuatu deserved special consideration since its premature removal from the list might jeopardize ongoing economic reform programmes. Vanuatu faced specific social, economic and ecological constraints which impeded its development. Fragility in the face of economic and fiscal shocks, high exposure to natural disasters, a narrow resource base held hostage to single-commodity price swings, modest natural resources and limited human capital combined to place small island States in a very vulnerable position. That phenomenon had been recognized by the international community in establishing the small island States vulnerability index. Since work on the index was proceeding and in view of the potential impact that the index might have on the consideration of a State's economic and social prospects, Australia believed that it was premature to graduate Vanuatu from the list of least developed countries and supported its request to defer consideration of its status until 2000.

29. **Mr. Cabactulan** (Philippines) said that he supported the statement made by the representative of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and expressed satisfaction with the result of the work carried out by the Economic and Social Council at its 1997 substantive session. Nevertheless, it would have been appropriate at the high-level segment, which had been attended by various ministers and the directors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), if the President of the World Bank had also been present in order to encourage the highest level of representation by member countries. While the dialogue with the executive heads of the funds and programmes had been very interesting, it would be necessary to introduce some innovative approaches to make the exchange of views at sessions of the Council more dynamic and productive. Furthermore, the results of the high-level segment, namely the agreed conclusions, should be summarized in a concise document which clearly indicated the questions that had been considered and the decisions taken.

30. With regard to operational activities, it should be kept in mind that the Economic and Social Council had adopted a resolution to strengthen its monitoring of funds and programmes, in which it had recommended that their executive boards should review, as a matter of priority, their funding plans, particularly with regard to core resources, in order to achieve their agreed targets and increase the target for voluntary contributions from official sources. The funds and programmes should inform the Council at its next substantive session about the measures that they had taken in response to that recommendation.

31. The Working Group on Informatics had made substantial progress, as could be seen from the report on its work submitted to the Committee. He hoped that, with the new infrastructure and the services currently available, it would be easier to provide General Assembly and Council documents to delegations speedily.

32. His delegation emphasized the importance of the new and innovative ideas for generating funds in order to comply with generally agreed commitments and priorities. It had not been possible to give that question due consideration at the last session of the Council and it was necessary to continue its consideration at the next high-level segment or perhaps even at an international conference in order to mobilize the necessary funds for development.

33. **Mr. Delaney** (Papua New Guinea) said that the Economic and Social Council had once again underscored the need for substantive increases in the core resources to fund United Nations operational activities for international cooperation for development. Unfortunately, that was not a new issue, but if it was resolved with genuine political will, international attention could focus on other matters, such as enhancing project implementation at the field level, policy coordination and residential system reforms.

34. As stated in the Council's report, the increased integration of the world economy had the potential for greater volatility, particularly in international financial markets. Since many developing countries had not been able to benefit from economic globalization, effective measures were required to assist their integration into the world economy. In that regard, his delegation was grateful for the work being carried out by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, with the help of other United Nations bodies, on the vulnerability index for small island developing States. The use of the index would make it possible to take due

account of the real economic and social conditions of particularly vulnerable developing States.

35. Papua New Guinea reaffirmed its support for the Committee for Development Planning, reiterated the need to maintain that Committee's independence and credibility, as had been done since its establishment, and underscored the important contributions that it had made on behalf of the international community, particularly with regard to the list of the least developed countries. His delegation agreed with the assessments undertaken by the Committee for Development Planning in response to Economic and Social Council resolution 46/206, contained in the report E/1997/35.With regard to the work of that Committee, his delegation firmly believed that, since the vulnerability index was currently being developed, the recommendation to graduate Vanuatu from the list of least developed countries was premature. He therefore strongly urged that that matter should be reconsidered.

36. **Ms. McDonald** (New Zealand) said that she shared the concern raised by the delegation of Vanuatu and others about the premature recommendation to graduate Vanuatu from the list of least developed countries. The data on which that recommendation was based were incomplete and did not take into account the particular circumstances faced by Vanuatu as a small island State. Pacific small island States are among the most geographically isolated countries. They were ecologically fragile, exposed to economic and fiscal shocks, had narrow resource bases and small populations and were prone to natural disasters. The work on the vulnerability index was not yet sufficiently advanced in order to predict its possible impact of the classification of Vanuatu and other small island least developed countries. While New Zealand fully supported the graduation of countries from the list of least developed countries when they reached a level of development which warranted that, it did not believe that that judgement could be made in the case of Vanuatu. She therefore, supported the calls to defer consideration of Vanuatu's graduation until the year 2000, when there would be more complete data on which to base a recommendation, and suggested that the decision adopting the report of the Economic and Social Council should be drafted to reflect that deferral.

37. **Ms. Williams-Stewart** (Samoa) joined other delegations in expressing support for the call by Vanuatu to postpone the decision on its graduation from the list of least developed countries until the year 2000. Her delegation agreed that countries should graduate from the list where there was sufficient information to justify such a decision and taking into account all the factors that could affect the socio-economic status of the country in question. Graduation from the list of least developed countries constituted recognition of the success of the Programme of Action for Sustainable Development. In the case of small island developing States, there were other indicators to measure their degree of economic development, such as those provided for in the Barbados Programme of Action, which was the framework for the development of the vulnerability index. It was extremely important to consider the economic status of small island developing States in that context, using indicators that took into account the constraints faced by such States as a result of their size, their environmental fragility and their economic vulnerability.

38. **Ms. Figuera** (Venezuela) said that the informatics revolution posed a challenge of unpredictable magnitude and unlimited effects, as rightly indicated by both the representative of Pakistan and the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics in his oral report on the work of the Working Group. The value of "virtual diplomacy" and the potential impact of new communication technologies on the management and resolution of international conflicts had already begun to be analysed in some forums. One of the most important aspects of the informatics revolution was, in fact, the risk of marginalization. Her delegation therefore recognized the importance of the work of the Working Group in ensuring that the benefits of the revolution increased and reached a wide range of countries.

39. One of the great achievements of the Working Group had been to identify fundamental requirements, which seemed to correspond to three main areas: connectivity, training and the elimination of barriers to accessing United Nations databases. Once those issues had been resolved, the Working Group had been able to exploit the opportunities informatics offered in order to optimize the work of the Organization, substantially reduce costs and benefit the largest possible number of Member States. The full extent of existing potential was still unknown and much remained to be done in order to ensure that the developing countries could benefit fully from technological advances; however, there was no doubt that the Working Group had done an excellent job to the benefit of all States Members of the United Nations. Its work deserved continued encouragement.

40. **Mr. Kondo** (Japan) said that the United Nations University enjoyed the full support of Japan, as host country. At the substantive session of the Economic and Social Commission in 1997, his delegation had drawn attention to the need for the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) to carry out a comprehensive review of the University's activities. His delegation was pleased that JIU had accepted that recommendation and had included the inspection in its

programme of work for 1998; he hoped that the review would help to enhance the efficiency of the University's work.

41. **Mr. McCook** (Jamaica) stressed the importance of the work of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics and the successful measures adopted in that context as a result of the constructive relationship established between the Secretariat and Member States through the mechanism of the Working Group. His delegation again congratulated the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on their efforts to apply the latest advances in information technology to the work of the Organization.

42. A critical area which deserved continued attention was the provision of support services by the Secretariat to Member States; it was to be hoped that that capacity would be strengthened. His delegation also looked forward to the exchange of information on the "millennium question" and welcomed the consideration of that important issue by the Working Group. Recent reports had highlighted the fact that many developing countries might not be equipped to deal with that complex and costly technical challenge, which would make it necessary to identify and modify certain portions of programmes that would stop working properly at the dawn of the year 2000.

43. His delegation took special note of the work of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library on the "Cyber School Bus" computer education project, which had helped to bring the United Nations to classrooms all over the world. It also noted that the training programmes organized by the Library continued to be oversubscribed, which reflected the interest of the Permanent Missions in incorporating information technology in their work. Such training opportunities should be expanded in order to meet the demand fully.

44. **Mr. Kerem** (Israel) expressed his delegation's strong opposition to the inclusion of the item on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli settlements on the Palestinian people in the agenda of the Economic and Social Council. The Council was an organ devoted to the promotion of social and economic matters and should not be a forum for political and propagandistic warfare or the perpetuation of political matters that were best dealt with in other forums.

45. All questions concerning the situation of the Palestinians were currently being dealt with in direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians themselves. While it was true that the process was advancing slowly, it was certainly not encouraged by the discussions in the United Nations, which, on the contrary, served only to exacerbate tensions, fan the flames of extremism and deepen the historical scepticism of Israel about what could be expected from the Organization.

46. Historically, the conflict in the Middle East had best been dealt with by the parties concerned. Self-perpetuating resolutions and tendentious reports, such as that of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, which were submitted every year to various bodies, did not serve the cause of peace. It was time they were abandoned and that the United Nations was able to devote its time and resources to other, more important questions.

47. **Mr. Žebrakovský** (Czech Republic) said that, in the past two years, the assistance provided to delegations in the field of information technology had increased tremendously. The efforts of all those who had contributed to that state of affairs should be acknowledged. The information technology revolution had two main interrelated components: technology and people. Perhaps the budgetary and resource allocation priorities of the United Nations system should be reconsidered with a view to keeping pace with technological progress. While technology was important, it was totally meaningless without the input of the human mind. There was much discussion about human resources development, education and the importance of knowledge but it seemed that the United Nations system was not doing its utmost in those spheres. More energy, time and resources should be devoted not only to the supply of technical equipment but also to human resources development and the education and training of Secretariat staff and even experts from the Missions.

48. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1997/1, on the need to harmonize and improve United Nations informatics systems, had called on the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics to design an overall information management strategy for the United Nations system. In view of the magnitude of the task, the Working Group should perhaps be formally upgraded to a higher status. In any event, it would require full support from the Secretariat, in which connection it was very satisfactory to learn of the personal support of the Secretary-General for information technology-related activities. As far as institutional support was concerned, the possible appointment of a chief information officer in charge of coordinating the development effort was worthy of serious consideration. Although the first steps in the application of information technology to the daily work of delegations had been accomplished, much remained to be done in the near future. Every effort should be made to coordinate the development of new projects in the Secretariat, since that would improve the level of information available to all those interested in the work of the United Nations system, and

would increase the cost-effectiveness of all investments in human resources and technology. Either of those reasons alone justified appropriate organizational and budgetary changes.

49. At present, information technology systems at the United Nations offered access to documents via the Internet. There was a need to expand coverage, so that all documents were posted on the Organization's web sites immediately after their adoption. However, the sites allowed only single-user access, although the United Nations system was the best possible example of group collaboration. Group work could be facilitated through even a small network of personal computers and the use of suitable groupware programmes already on the market. His delegation felt privileged to have witnessed such an important development at the United Nations and hoped that the above steps would be implemented as soon as possible.

50. **Mr. Ravou-Akii** (Vanuatu) said that his delegation endorsed the statement on the item by the representative of Tanzania on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, and welcomed the support expressed by the delegations of Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Samoa with regard to the status of Vanuatu. With reference to Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/223, entitled "Report of the Committee for Development Planning on its thirty-first session", of 18 July 1997, he said that in the Pacific region there were only five least developed countries, two of which were close to meeting the criteria set by the United Nations for graduation from that category. One of those two countries was Vanuatu, whose graduation from the list of least developed countries had been approved by the Economic and Social Council in the above resolution. In that regard, it should be recalled that the Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, in his statement of 7 October 1997 in the general debate at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, had indicated that the graduation of the Republic of Vanuatu from the list was premature. His delegation reiterated the reasons underlying that statement.

51. **Mr. Manele** (Solomon Islands) supported the comments made by the representative of Vanuatu regarding the careful consideration that must be undertaken before a country was graduated from the list of least developed countries. The criteria for graduating must not be solely economic, namely per capita income, but must also take account of the other factors making least developed countries vulnerable. Small island States in particular, faced problems to a greater degree than other States. They included the threat of environmental degradation and natural disasters, the threat to economic security, marginalization from globalization and trade liberalization, and heavy dependence on foreign resource flows. The concept of vulnerability must take into account the ability of least developed countries to face up to such risks. Many least developed countries suffered from acute vulnerability, notwithstanding relatively high per capita income.

52. When a country was graduated from the least developed category, it became ineligible for loans from international financial institutions. That was a particular problem for small island States, which had limited access to multilateral loans. In other words, successful economic performance could work against high-income countries through exclusion from lending by international financial institutions. There was therefore a need for the international community to recognize the multi-dimensional nature of the vulnerability of least developed countries, especially small island States, and to take those States into account in their programmes and assessments. The vulnerability index used should be widely accepted. The least developed countries themselves must be prepared to accept and cope with the challenge of their graduation from the list.

53. **Mr. Kwok** (Singapore), referring to the decision by the Committee for Development Planning to graduate Vanuatu from the list of least developed countries, said that Vanuatu, as a small island developing State, faced a specific set of challenges. The Expert Group which would meet in December was still studying those problems and their impact on the development of Vanuatu and other small island developing States, so as to incorporate them in the vulnerability index. His delegation welcomed the work on the index, which would allow for consideration to be given to the special needs and circumstances of small island developing States and would have a significant bearing on Vanuatu's status as a least developed country. Its premature graduation from the list might present a setback to the economic reform programme undertaken by the Government; as a result, his delegation expressed support for Vanuatu's request that the review of its status as a least developed country should be deferred to the year 2000.

54. **Mr. Bahamondes** (Canada) said that the process followed by the United Nations to determine whether a country should be included in the least developed category was satisfactory and the indicators employed were appropriate. The United Nations list of least developed countries, because of its objectivity, was recognized as a valid indicator of level of development, and as such was widely used, including outside the United Nations. His delegation valued and respected that objectivity and would like it to be maintained. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that the United Nations would, from time to time, need to review its working methods.

55. The Committee for Development Planning, in its 1997 report, had recommended that the United Nations should review the question of a vulnerability index. As already pointed out, small island States faced intrinsic constraints which had been recognized by the international community, the United Nations and other international organizations. Accordingly, his delegation joined those which had requested deferral of Vanuatu's graduation from least developed country status until its situation could be equitably assessed, namely, as soon as possible after the deliberations on a vulnerability index had been completed.

56. **Mr. Draunimasi** (Fiji) said that Vanuatu, in common with other Pacific island States, owing to its scant natural resources, lack of export commodities, lack of diversification of its economy and the natural disasters which afflicted it every year, was not in a position to attain sustainable development. It should also be recalled that graduation from the least developed category made countries ineligible to receive concessionary loans from financial institutions. His delegation therefore supported the request by Vanuatu and urged deferral of the decision on its graduation from the list of least developed countries until it was in a position to attain sustainable development.

57. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 12.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.